

Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program

Report to the 60th Legislature
2007 Legislative Session



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
January 2007

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Program Overview

The Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program was established in 1987 as a pheasant release program. This program was funded by earmarking \$2.00 from each resident upland bird license and \$23 from each non-resident upland bird license sold. This also included the upland bird license associated with the resident sportsmen's license and the non-resident B-10 combination licenses. All of these funds were slated for releasing upland game birds. In 1989 the legislature changed the program to allow the use of monies not spent on upland game bird releases for enhancement and conservation of upland game bird habitat (87-1-247, MCA). This statute also includes certain spending requirements related to administrative costs and proportion of funding required to be spent annually on upland game bird releases. More specifically, the statute limits spending on program administration to 15% of revenue received during a given fiscal year. The statute also sets aside 15% of revenue for upland game bird releasing and requires that 25% of these funds be spent each fiscal year. The following table includes a breakdown of revenue and expenditures of the upland game bird enhancement program as well as specific expenditure information related to these statutory requirements.

Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program revenue and spending Fiscal Years 2005-07 (MCA, 87-1-246 and 87-1-247).

Fiscal Year 2005	Upland Game Bird Release	Habitat Enhancement	Program Totals
Revenue	\$ 103,975	\$ 644,386	\$ 748,361
Expenditures	\$ 105,923	\$ 156,939	\$ 262,862
Budget Rules¹	Minimum Expenditure \$ 25,994	Allowed Administrative Costs \$112,254 Actual Administrative Costs \$47,614	
Fiscal Year 2006	Upland Game Bird Release	Habitat Enhancement	Program Totals
Revenue	\$ 104,772	\$ 705,507	\$ 810,279
Expenditures	\$ 126,456	\$ 837,689	\$ 964,145
Budget Rules¹	Minimum Expenditure \$ 26,193	Allowed Administrative Costs \$121,542 Actual Administrative Cost \$57,596	

Fiscal Year 2007 (estimates)	Upland Game Bird Release	Habitat Enhancement	Program Totals
Revenue	\$ 99,969	\$ 633,286	\$ 733,255
Expenditures²	\$ 131,210	\$ 73,568	\$ 204,778
Budget Rules¹	Minimum Expenditure \$ 24,992	Allowed Administrative Costs \$109,988 Actual Administrative Cost \$26,640	

¹MCA 87-1-247 (1-3): Not more than 15% of the money generated may be used for administrative purposes. 15% of funds collected must be set aside each fiscal year for upland game bird releases of which, 25% must be spent each fiscal year.

²Current estimate based on expenditures as of November 30, 2006

Upland Game Bird Release Projects

As described, the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP) funds two types of projects: 1) upland game bird releases and 2) habitat enhancement. The following table is a summary of pheasant releases funded through UGBEP during 2005-2006.

Table 1. Summary of pheasant releases funded through the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, 2005-2006.

Year	Number of Contracts Funded	Pheasants Released
2005	93	14,654
2006	115	18,767

Upland Game Bird Habitat Projects

The Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (UGBHEP) obligated funds for 42 contracts during the past 2 years. These projects on both private and public lands included shelterbelts, food plots, sagebrush leases, and grazing systems (Table 2). All projects included shared funding or in-kind contributions from a mix of private landowners, Pheasants Forever Chapters, BLM, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and USDA programs. Overall, UGBHEP contracts made up about 50% of project costs (Table 2). As part of these contracts, approximately 179,000 acres of private land are open for reasonable public upland game bird hunting accommodating 3,479 hunter-days. As of fall 2006 there were 549 active UGBHEP contracts.

In 2004, approximately \$1.1 million of UGBHEP funds were also obligated in partnership with \$1.1 million of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Landowner Incentive

Program funds for purchasing 30-year sagebrush conservation leases on private land in Montana. This voluntary incentive-based approach, known as the Montana Sagebrush Initiative, is intended to help conserve privately-owned sage grouse habitat, as described in the final state sage grouse plan. A geographic information system (GIS) utilizing multiple information layers, including sagebrush habitats, public lands, and active sage grouse leks, was used to objectively identify high priority habitats for conservation. Private landowners in the highest priority areas were mailed information on the program and FWP is following up with interested landowners. The leases include a one-time payment to landowners of \$12/acre while agreeing to not spray, burn or till sagebrush. If FWP and the landowner determine that some type of manipulation would benefit sage grouse, the contract will allow limited treatments upon mutual consent. This initial funding (\$2.2 million in total) is sufficient for funding 183,000 acres of leases. As of the end of November 2006, FWP has enrolled 130,330 acres involving 25 separate contracts.

Table 2. Summary of Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program projects enrolled during 2005-2006 (to date).

Project Type	Project Acres	Region	Estimated FWP Cost ¹	Estimated Total Cost ¹
Nesting Cover	640	7	\$7,886.40	\$31,545.60
Nesting Cover	50	3	\$1,058.00	\$1,058.00
Nesting Cover	40	7	\$0.00	\$1,450.00
Nesting Cover	28	5	\$2,092.50	\$6,150.00
Nesting Cover	266	7	\$3,913.48	\$7,826.96
Nesting Cover	28	5	\$2,092.50	\$6,150.00
Nesting Cover	50	3	\$1,058.00	\$1,058.00
Range Management	1540	6	\$27,258.00	\$47,388.00
Range Management	380	5	\$5,000.00	\$20,000.00
Sagebrush Lease	2008	7	\$12,048.00	\$24,096.00
Sagebrush Lease	320	7	\$1,920.00	\$3,840.00
Sagebrush Lease	3082	5	\$18,492.00	\$36,984.00
Sagebrush Lease	5145	5	\$30,870.00	\$61,740.00
Sagebrush Lease	4296	7	\$25,776.00	\$51,552.00
Sagebrush Lease	320	7	\$640.00	\$1,280.00
Sagebrush Lease	6237	7	\$37,422.00	\$74,844.00
Sagebrush Lease	600	5	\$3,600.00	\$7,200.00
Sagebrush Lease	14606	7	\$87,636.00	\$175,272.00
Sagebrush Lease	160	4	\$960.00	\$1,920.00
Sagebrush Lease	1250	7	\$7,500.00	\$15,000.00
Sagebrush Lease	47771	7	\$286,626.00	\$573,252.00
Sagebrush Lease	638	5	\$3,828.00	\$7,656.00
Sagebrush Lease	2043	5	\$12,258.00	\$24,516.00
Sagebrush Lease	3218	7	\$19,308.00	\$38,616.00
Sagebrush Lease	7622	7	\$45,732.00	\$91,464.00
Sagebrush Lease	960	6	\$5,760.00	\$11,520.00
Sagebrush Lease	757	6	\$4,542.00	\$9,084.00
Sagebrush Lease	4001	5	\$24,006.00	\$48,012.00
Sagebrush Lease	11016	7	\$66,096.00	\$132,192.00

Project Type	Project Acres	Region	Estimated FWP Cost ¹	Estimated Total Cost ¹
Sagebrush Lease	6741	7	\$40,446.00	\$80,892.00
Sagebrush Lease	625	5	\$7,500.00	\$7,500.00
Sagebrush Lease	4480	6	\$26,880.00	\$53,760.00
Sagebrush Lease	2121	4	\$12,726.00	\$25,452.00
Sagebrush Lease	320	5	\$1,920.00	\$3,840.00
Shelterbelts	11	4	\$6,120.00	\$8,855.00
Shelterbelts	4	1	\$2,005.00	\$5,655.00
Shelterbelts	5	3	\$4,203.96	\$4,203.96
Shelterbelts	8	4	\$4,775.88	\$7,911.58
Shelterbelts	5	3	\$3,719.00	\$3,719.00
Shelterbelts	4	4	\$8,294.75	\$12,292.75
Winter Food or Cover Plots	50	2	\$2,500.00	\$3,400.00
Winter Food or Cover Plots	989	7	\$9,698.00	\$16,486.60
Winter Food or Cover Plots	10	6	\$500.00	\$670.00
Winter Food or Cover Plots	6	4	\$6,336.00	\$8,448.00
Winter Food or Cover Plots	10	6	\$500.00	\$670.00
Winter Food or Cover Plots	30	4	\$0.00	\$0.00
Winter Food or Cover Plots	20	7	\$600.00	\$1,005.00
Winter Food or Cover Plots	61	6	\$4,292.84	\$4,292.84
Totals by Contract	134,572		\$888,396	\$1,761,720

¹Some contracts with multiple projects did not break down total costs by individual project type. Therefore, costs showing "\$0.00" are actually included with costs in a different project from the same contract.

UGBE Program Updates

FWP has worked on or completed the following programmatic tasks during the past biennium:

- Developed and installed new signs for all landowners enrolled in UGBEP. The signs include landowner name and contact information for hunters to inquire about access.
- FWP developed a new project database. Improvements over the old database include: 1) the program generates voucher covers for making payments, which will ensure all payments for individual projects are accounted for; 2) the database is organized in a tiered fashion allowing multiple projects and amendments to be designated under a single contract; 3) additional fields were added to electronically store monitoring and update narrative; 4) the database will eventually be accessible to field staff through the state network for the purposes of tracking projects, developing regional reports, and entering monitoring information.
- FWP sent out a survey to landowners to assess hunter use of active pheasant release and habitat projects during the 2006 hunting season. This information will be compiled, summarized, and available for review by the end of January 2007.

- In an effort to focus more energy on pheasant habitat projects, FWP developed an agreement with Pheasants Forever, Inc. (PF) to hire a habitat specialist located in the Sidney area. This individual will work with landowners and state and federal agencies and PF chapters to develop and enhance pheasant habitat in portions of Richland and Dawson Counties. This position is funded with UGBEP funds. Kraig Paulson was hired in the position and relocated to Sidney in September 2006. Another contract may be developed with PF in the future in another part of Montana if this approach proves successful.

UGBE Program Improvements

ARM Rules and a Policy Manual for the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program were last completed by FWP in 2001. Since that time, the department has realized the need for additional updates and improvements to the program. FWP received recommendations from the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Advisory Council (see below) in 2006. In addition, the UGBEP coordinator also met with department field staff to develop a needs list for improving the program. The intent of improvements include: 1) streamline paperwork and enrollment process; 2) update and develop guidelines for different project types; 3) incorporate recommendations from the Advisory Council and department staff; and 4) revise contracts to match new database entry formats. FWP intends to make these changes in the upcoming biennium.

UGBEP Advisory Council

FWP organized the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Advisory Council to solicit recommendations for improving operation of UGBEP. The Council met twice over the past two years and developed the following recommendations:

- The current payment of \$50/acre for food plots is not sufficient and needs to be raised. *Passed*
- Allow pheasant releases in counties that were set aside from the program for evaluation. *No second to the motion*
- General endorsement of the final recommendation of Upland Game Bird Citizen's Advisory Council.¹ *Passed*
- The Council recognizes that pheasant hunting opportunities for average Montana hunters are a rapidly shrinking resource due to competition from wealthy hunters. This problem needs innovative, long-term solutions. *Passed*
- Go on record in support of continuation and improvement in the quality of CRP habitats. *Passed*
- Make contact with Alan Charles to get a summary of the action taken by the last legislature on the PLPW recommendations. *Passed*
- Remove the requirement for irrigating shelterbelts but emphasize the need for adequate ground preparation and maintenance over the length of the contract. *Passed*
- A standard contract be developed for supplemental feeding. *No second to the motion*

¹The Upland Game Bird Citizen Advisory Council was an earlier committee that provided recommendations on all aspects of upland game bird management in Montana. An electronic copy of their final 2003 recommendations can be found under "News" at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/uplandgamebird/default.html>